

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

DATE : October 23, 2023

TO : Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

FROM : Joe Lamers, Director, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

SUBJECT : 2024 Balancing Act – Budget Engagement Results

BACKGROUND

Balancing Act is an interactive online budgeting tool created by a public policy strategy firm called Engaged Public. Balancing Act is designed to be an easy to use and easy to understand online tool for public sector organizations to generate public feedback related to budget decisions. The simulation breaks down public budgets into categories of revenues and expenditures. Within each category, users can manipulate revenue streams and expenditures and submit a balanced budget based on their priorities. Organizations can use the data collected as a tool to see the breakdown of where the public holds preferences related to the budget.

OVERVIEW

Milwaukee County used Balancing Act as a tool to engage the public in the budget process for the first time in 2018. For the 2024 budget process, the tool was opened to the public in July. Users are asked to submit budget priority areas in consideration of available funds. The 2024 Balancing Act simulation started with a \$31.6 million budget surplus. This was the projected surplus for the 2024 budget after the approval of State of Wisconsin 2023 Act and approval of a 0.4% sales tax increase. Balancing Act users can identify priority areas to allocate the projected surplus. Department budgets within the 2024 Balancing Act simulation are based on tax levy funding within the 2023 budget.

The 2024 Milwaukee County Balancing Act page has received approximately 2,050 page views and 294 total budget submissions. This report provides a summary of the results, based on Balancing Act user submissions.

RESULTS

Revenues

Within the 2024 Balancing Act simulation, participants were given the option to increase or decrease property taxes or Wheel taxes, or to borrow funds from the County’s savings account (reserves). On average, users chose to reduce property taxes by \$612,244, increase wheel tax by \$57,627, and borrow \$119,047 from reserves.

| Description | Average Increase/Decrease per change | % Of Submissions/Decreased Increased |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Decrease Property Tax | \$(612,244) | 18% |
| Increase Wheel Tax | \$57,627 | 17% |
| Borrow from County Savings Account | \$119,047 | 2% |

Expenditures

Within the 2024 Balancing Act simulation, participants had the opportunity to use the \$31.6 million in surplus to add funding to departments or to increase capital expenditures. Balancing Act data shows the amount of funding and percent of users that chose to increase or decrease department funding, by any nominal amount. Below is a summary by program area.

| Category Name | Median Submission Increase/Decrease | % of Submissions Increased | % Submissions Decreased | % Submissions Unchanged |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Capital Expenditures | \$7,000,000 | 52.38% | 6.12% | 41.49% |
| Parks | \$6,000,000 | 96.25% | 3.74% | 0% |
| Mental Health Services | \$3,700,000 | 47.95% | 2.38% | 49.65% |
| Bus System | \$3,300,000 | 68.36% | 6.8% | 33.33% |
| Housing | \$2,000,000 | 61.90% | 38.09% | 0% |
| Court System | \$1,500,000 | 30.27% | 0% | 89.11% |
| Child Support Services | \$1,300,000 | 47.27% | 3.74% | 48.97% |
| 911 Call Center and Emergency Medical Services | \$750,000 | 37.75% | 3.6% | 59.18% |
| Administration & General Government | \$646,771 | 19.04% | 80.95% | 0% |
| Senior Centers | \$500,000 | 51.02% | 4.08% | 44.89% |
| Sherriff Operations | \$338,663 | 32.31 | 20.74% | 46.93% |
| Medical Examiner | \$206,230 | 36.39% | 2.72% | 60.88% |
| Pension and Healthcare | \$172,789 | 26.87% | 12.58% | 60.54% |
| Elected Offices | (\$300,000) | 10.20% | 16.66% | 73.12% |
| Prisons and Jails | (\$600,000) | 23.12% | 22.11% | 54.76% |

Outreach

Balancing Act’s goal is to encourage the public to provide input on the 2024 budget. Objectives were to reach residents throughout Milwaukee County with mediums that were highly trafficked and would produce participation. When the 2024 Balancing Act simulation was launched, a press release was distributed to promote use of the tool. The press release was covered by local media outlets. Balancing Act was promoted on social media platforms. Use of Balancing Act was promoted at County Executive Budget Town Hall meetings and at other public events. The various sources promoted accessibility of the budgeting tool for the public.

Demographics

After submitting a balanced budget in Balancing Act, users were asked to self-identify demographic information such as municipality, age, ethnicity, and education level.

| Education Demographics | Count | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Associates Degree | 20 | 7% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 111 | 38% |
| High School | 13 | 4.4% |
| Master's Degree | 70 | 23.8% |
| PHD, Law or Medical | 15 | 5.1% |
| Some College | 34 | 11.56% |
| Some High School | 1 | 0.34% |
| Some Postgrad | 13 | 4.4% |

| Age Demographics | Count | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| <18 | 1 | .3% |
| >70 | 26 | 8.8% |
| 18-29 | 43 | 14.6% |
| 30-49 | 140 | 47.6% |
| 50-69 | 69 | 23.4% |

| Racial/Ethnic Background Demographics | Count | Percentage |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1 | 1% |
| Asian | 7 | 1% |
| Black or African American | 29 | 12% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 1 | 0% |
| Prefer Not to Say | 40 | 16% |
| White | 194 | 70% |

RECOMMENDATION

This report is provided for informational purposes only. No action is needed.

Prepared by
Anthony Rux
Budget & Management Analyst
Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

JOSEPH LAMERS

Joe Lamers, Director
Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance
Department of Administrative Services

Cc: David Crowley, Milwaukee County Executive
Liz Sumner, Chair, Finance and Audit Committee
Steven Cady, Research and Policy Director, Office of the Comptroller
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Office of the County Executive
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board
Dan Laurila, Operating Budget Manager